

TOWN PLANNING AND CONSERVATION OF LIFE

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IMPROVEMENT OF SLUM AREAS

THERE is probably no more common objection to schemes that have for their object the erection of new dwellings in suburban areas than that which is made by the housing reformer, who looks upon the improvement of slum areas as the only way to solve the housing problem. But it is just as easy to place too much emphasis on providing remedies for the slum problem within the slum areas themselves as it is to be too much concerned about building new houses and carrying out town planning schemes with the danger of neglecting the slum problem. If we confine all our attention to the curing of the evils in congested areas, we can never catch up with the problem, as new slums will go on being created in newly developed areas for want of preventive measures.

The creation of garden suburbs, with houses for workmen, and in a position where the homes are convenient to places of employment, does have the effect of indirectly relieving congestion in crowded areas. If this kind of scheme were carried out on a sufficiently large scale, it would



SLUM DWELLERS IN A CANADIAN CITY

greatly help to improve the slum area, by setting up standards to be followed in some degree by the owners of property in the crowded central areas.

Undoubtedly, however, the proper procedure in this matter, as in all matters of city development, is to take a comprehensive view of the whole problem, and not to deal with it in components, except in the degree that such components are linked up with a general scheme.

The clearance of slum areas is always costly, and one of the reasons it is so is the lack of proper power to expropriate slum property without having to pay compensation for rights of ownership that should not exist.

When property becomes sufficiently unwholesome for habitation as to be legally "unhealthy" there should be no capital value attached to that property for purposes of habitation. In other words, the owners should either be compelled to make the property habitable before they

are permitted to rent it, or to permit it to be demolished without being compensated. When it is found necessary for the city to acquire such property, the payment therefor should be limited to the value of the land plus the value of the materials, except with regard to property that can be used for a healthy purpose.

SLUM CLEARANCE IN ENGLAND.—The new English housing law provides for the acquisition of slum property on this basis. There, the policy and practice now followed after long and extensive experience, is sound. The most important rules that have to be followed are:—

(1) The making of a comprehensive survey of any district in which there are slum areas; the scheduling of areas which are unhealthy; differentiating between those which need immediate treatment and those which will have to be dealt with at later stages;

(2) On the basis of the survey, preparing a definite programme for dealing with all the slum areas in the district, and carrying out the work in steps towards the fulfilment of that programme;

(3) Preparing schemes for the more urgent areas, dealing with them bit by bit as part of the complete plan;

(4) In preparing schemes, considering whether the evils of slum areas can be removed without wholesale clearance of the buildings, and by such methods as getting rid of individual buildings that obstruct light and air, or renovating the buildings, or by placing them under good management.

(5) When a site has to be cleared, it should be planned not merely for the purpose of providing houses in substitution for those destroyed, but with due regard to the use that can be made of the plan in improving the means of communication through the area, and generally how it can be made to fit in to the best advantage with the plan of the whole town. This means that the plan for the future development of towns or cities should be prepared in advance of the slum clearance scheme. It is futile to carry out such a scheme at great cost merely to relieve temporarily existing conditions. A permanent improvement should be sought.

In both England and Canada, regard should be paid, in dealing with slum areas, to protection of old buildings of an architectural charm or an historical value. These are often unsanitary, but it may be worth the cost to renovate them, rather than demolish them.

SURVEY.—As stated, the first duty of local authorities in England is to undertake a survey of their districts, in which the slum areas would be defined and estimates given. Where the problem is pressing, this may have to be confined to a study of the slum areas without regard to their forms of development, but it would be better, where possible, to make the survey part of a comprehensive and detailed survey of the city or town. This is not required under the English scheme, but is important.

The English policy also insists that a continuous survey should be made in the form of a periodical study of the problem, including records of the incidence of disease and death in the different areas. A large scale map should be kept to show by different colours the existing conditions.

Having ascertained what the conditions are, and what remedies are required, the next step is to prepare and submit schemes for securing the needed remedies. These schemes have to be submitted in three stages, within definite periods, and only detailed schemes are required for those parts of the proposals that require sanction of the government and involve the borrowing of money.

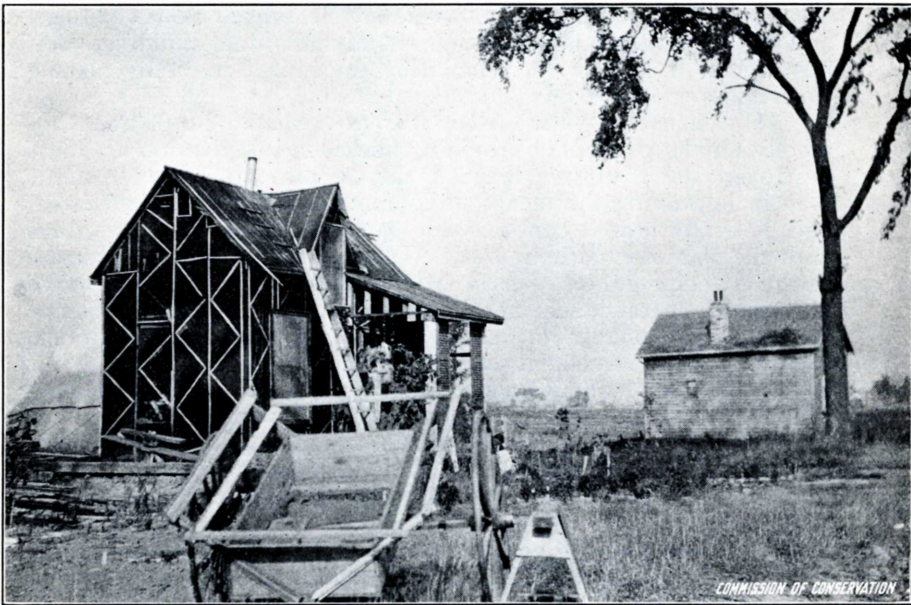
Certain conditions have to be complied with. At present the shortage of houses makes it necessary that these slum clearance schemes should not involve the turning of persons out of the present houses until new accommodation is available. Reasonable consideration has

to be given to the rights of owners, and demolition should only be proceeded with, and even then very cautiously, where houses are totally unfit. Existing dwellings should be improved where practicable, in preference to demolition, and special consideration should be given to preserving buildings having historical or aesthetic value.

England is divided into regions for the purpose of housing administration. Regional organization covers wide areas and does not follow any scheme for planning the regions as a basis for a town planning and housing policy. It would seem preferable to have the regions of a smaller size and fixed so as to form suitable units for industrial or rural development. The housing scheme, including slum clearance schemes, should then be made to conform to a regional scheme.

In dealing with a matter of this kind it is essential to have a judicial authority as a board of appeal, and to hold public hearings to give full opportunity for consideration of the objections.

ENGLISH HOUSING STANDARDS.—In the manual used by the British Government it is pointed out that two different standards have to be considered in regard to housing accommodation. There is what may



RESULT OF INJURIOUS SPECULATION IN THE SUBURBS OF A CANADIAN CITY

Most of the surrounding land is lying idle.

be termed the standard of mere fitness, which implies that a house is free from any defects that would render it unfit for habitation. There is also a higher standard, which implies that the house is not only free from these defects but has the advantages and the amenities which are desirable for a healthy and contented home life. The former may be all that can be obtained under slum improvement schemes, and the latter may be the result of new housing.

The minimum standard requires that a fit house should be free of serious dampness; satisfactorily lighted and ventilated; properly drained, provided with adequate sanitary conveniences, and with a sink and suitable arrangements for disposal of slop water; in good general repair; a satisfactory water supply; adequate washing accommodation;

adequate facilities for preparing and cooking food; a well ventilated place for food.

APPLICATION OF STANDARDS TO CANADA.—A similar standard of fitness should apply in Canada. As in England, dampness is one of the worst defects in Canadian houses that may be regarded as unfit. As a standard of light, a living-room should not require artificial light during ordinary daylight. Proper ventilation involves having outside space for circulation, as well as means of circulation within the dwelling. Sanitary conveniences and water supply should conform to the requirements of the local board of health, with due regard to city and country conditions, and a tap within the dwelling with a supply of water from an uncontaminated source should be necessary. In regard to general repairs, Canada suffers most from defective paving of yards or no paving with the result that foul water is allowed to accumulate on the surface and become impregnated with the soil.

The procedure followed in England is not quite adaptable to Canadian conditions. When the proper kind of policy is adopted, the method of carrying it out can be arranged under by-law.

The urgent need is to determine what is an unhealthy area or an unhealthy house, to insist on a minimum standard for all houses and then to secure the proper legislation for enforcing this standard.

Under the English Act an area is unhealthy because of defects of planning; for instance, the existence of narrow streets or congested buildings would be such a defect; or because of defects of individual houses such as want of sanitary conveniences, etc. Definite evidence has to be given to prove that an area is unhealthy, so as to justify the steps that have to be taken to demolish buildings or improve them. During the carrying out of the scheme temporary housing accommodation has to be provided if permanent accommodation is not available for the persons displaced.

It will thus be seen that a definite constructive policy for dealing with the slums is now in operation in England and that the excessive regard for property rights that has retarded the improvement of slum areas is now at an end. There should not be property rights in dwellings used for human habitation that are a menace to the health, morality and well-being of the race. That is a lesson that needs to be learned in all countries.—*Thomas Adams.*

PROVINCIAL HOUSING IN ONTARIO

THE work of the Ontario Housing Commission during the year of its operation under the Act of 1919 should be sufficient proof, to those still hesitating as to the wisdom and practicability of a housing project, that the towns and cities of Canada are ready to respond to a progressive and vigorous policy to assist the thousands of bewildered and distressed homeseekers.

During the year 99 municipalities in Ontario passed bylaws under the provisions of the Act and appointed Housing Commissions, including 19 cities, 49 towns, 17 villages and 14 townships. Houses have been built in 68 municipalities, and in the remainder programmes have been prepared with a view to building activity during the present season.

In addition to the municipal housing commissions, private companies have also been incorporated under the Act, at Hawkesbury, Hamilton, Fergus, Iroquois Falls, Listowel, Kitchener and Waterloo, and some of these have already commenced operations.

The appropriation to the municipalities of Ontario during 1919 was \$10,629,000. Of this amount \$5,125,000 was appropriated to 17 cities; \$3,649,000 to 39 towns; \$735,000 to 17 villages and \$1,120,000

to 11 townships. It is estimated that \$8,000,000 more would have been required under the Act of 1919 if all the demands were satisfied.

The houses built number 1,184 and the average loan per house was \$3,106.40, which, with the cost of building estimated as 125 per cent higher than before the war, must be considered satisfactory. Frame buildings number 448, solid brick 460 and brick-veneer 276, 1,060 being detached houses and 124 semi-detached. The houses have been planned so as to secure the maximum accommodation at a minimum of expense. There has been active discouragement of small and narrow lots, and, with the exception of Toronto, the price of building lots has been reasonable. Outside of Toronto and the Windsor district the average frontage of lots has been 40 feet with a depth of 100 feet. The average cost per lot has worked out at \$377.85, which is approximately \$10 per foot frontage.

The price of building lots, as revealed by the transactions of the various local commissions, is interesting and is indicated as follows:—Sudbury, \$600; Ottawa, 493.90; New Toronto, \$466.02; Welland, \$356.25; Hawkesbury, \$300; Brantford, \$300; Acton, \$285.71; London, \$261.11; Guelph, \$257.27; Galt, \$250; St. Catharines, \$211.14; Milverton, \$175; Oshawa, \$162.25; and Elmira, \$160.

It is worthy of note that the occupants of the new houses are finding that the monthly payments for principal and interest, including taxes and insurance, are less than the rentals for similar houses in the same municipalities.

In all cases where practicable prospective owners have been encouraged to work on their own house, this with a view to keeping down the amount of the loan required and to encourage craftsmanship and wholesome exercise of the creative instinct. It has also been proved, contrary to the accepted theory, that bungalows, consisting of cellar and all living and sleeping rooms on the ground floor, can be erected at less cost than houses of two storeys. This is attributed to the saving in the cost of labour by a reduced need of hoisting material.

The Chief Architect, Mr. James Govan, considers that the project has proved that houses three rooms deep are not necessary or desirable except on unusually wide lots or in very special cases on very narrow lots, and he does not think that the verandah placed across the front of the house justifies itself in a climate where it can only be used for a few months of the year and where its effect is to shut out the sunlight throughout the entire year. Mr. Govan also points out that where local commissions can secure large blocks of land and build houses in quantities opportunities for town planning present themselves that should not be neglected.

CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

HAS the rural policy in Canada in the past had conservation and development of life as its final aim?

The land question, and all questions of conservation of natural resources, are fundamental questions, because they have to do with life. The final aim of all effort, whether individual or social, is life itself, its preservation and increase in quantity or quality or both.

Conservation means economy and development at the same time. To conserve the forests means to prevent waste—for without that prevention there cannot be economy—and, simultaneously, to develop new growth. To conserve land resources means to prevent deterioration of the productive uses of the land that has already been equipped and